

CAMEO KIRBY

By Booth
Tarkington and
Harry Leon
Wilson

Adapted From
the Play of the Same
Name by W. B. M.
Ferguson

Copyright, 1909, by the
Ainslee Magazine Company

Subtle humor, tear impelling pathos, dueling, lynch law, suicide, attempted murder, gambling, heart entanglement and realistic character drawing combine to make "Cameo Kirby" an unusual play and an unusual novel—a cameo of modern fiction finely graven, richly set; a word cameo by those master craftsmen Booth Tarkington and Harry Leon Wilson, whereon are shifting pictures of the old days along the Mississippi when the Natchez and the Robert E. Lee raced to New Orleans with fortunes at stake; old days when gamblers, amateur and professional, won and lost almost unbelievable sums on the river steamers; days when Mark Twain was a pilot and when the real life prototype of Jim Bludso of the Prairie Belle held "her nozle ag'in the bank till the last galoot" was ashore. A well born, well intentioned young man through association with bad companions becomes an accomplished gambler. Falsely accused of murder, he meets a young girl, with whom he falls in love. How vital complications baffle him, how conspiracy places his life in the balance, how the love of a pure woman may work wonders in the regeneration of a man—these themes and others give "Cameo Kirby" its thrill, its fascination, its powerful heart interest.

CHAPTER I.

"ONE CARD," said John Randall quietly, extending a hand as firm as was his voice. For the first time in twenty-four hours the debt of intoxication was paid solely by his eyes. Perhaps the pile of double eagles strewn before him on the green baize table conveyed a fugitive and sobering realization of the present; drove home the fact, as only hard earned money can, that this delightful levitation of the senses, this genial warmth of body and soul, this impression that he was a nabob who might hazard with a care free hand, was purely fictitious and that the morning would find him a sepulcher filled with the decaying bones of dead emotions and the living worm of remorse. That pile of gold twinkling under the oil lamps in a private stateroom of the John W. Shotwell represented one-tenth of his yearly income, and yet he was blithely staking it on



CAMEO KIRBY EXHIBED A DEBONAIR AND BAKISH ATMOSPHERE.

the turn of a single card at poker, for that was the game that was being played—staking it as indifferently as he had staked and lost its predecessors. He pulled himself together with the air of one who, guilty of a false start, is but the more confident of the future, while he reflected with some pride that his extended hand was as steady as that of his impassive opponent. As the cards lay he was beaten, but luck must eventually change, and a four card "inside straight" was his weakness—weakness and strength, for when he drew to one he "filled."

"Here's luck," said Colonel Moreau heartily, extending the pasteboard. "It's bound to change some time, suh, and even a niggah could beat a mensy pair of deuces. I'll take three."

Randall glanced at his card and as he laid it face down on the table strove to keep the sudden exultation from his eyes. But as Moreau spread out his draw, disclosing trash, the planter lost his momentary self control.

"Drew to an inside straight and filled it, by gad!" he cried excitedly,

"There's the turn in the tide, colonel! It rarely ever goes back on me. That's what I've been waiting foh. Let me draw to a four card inside straight and I'll bet my immortal soul that I fill her. Yes, suh."

A satiric gleam flickered in Moreau's black eyes as he indifferently shoved his lost bet across the table.

"One thousand to yoh, suh," he said courteously, stifling a yawn—"a most remarkable example of good fortune



A SATIRIC GLEAM FLICKERED IN MOREAU'S BLACK EYES.

and one that was a-coming to yoh. Allow me, suh, to drink to the turn in the tide." And, filling the other's glass, he bowed with the most admirable courtesy and good feeling.

"Yoh health, colonel," replied the other thickly, mopping his face with an immense silk handkerchief, "and my compliments foh the sentiment, suh. I can return them by adding that the tide had already turned even befoh I had the pleasure and good fortune of making yoh acquaintance, suh. I reckon that, all in all, my trip to New Orleans this year has been very lucky—very lucky, suh—foh I have sold my sugar crop foh ten thousand, a much higher figure than I reckoned, considering the poh price of cane. And my luck still follows me by permitting this indulgence of my favorite game with a gentleman, suh, of yoh standing. My plantation is at Plaquemine, and—"

"The Randalls are well known, suh," interrupted Moreau, with delicate deference, which went to the point of refilling the other's glass—"The Randall, I presume, suh, who so distinguished himself at the defense of the Alamo?" This was stated as a known fact, rather than a chance shot, which in reality it was.

"My brother, suh," gravely replied the planter, tapping his ample breast as if in order to convey the sentiment that the same noble spark of heroism smoldered therein, awaiting but a fitting opportunity of burning its owner's name on the immutable pages of history. "Peace hath her victories no less renowned than war," he added oracularly, instinctively reaching for his glass, "and it was my fortune to stay at home and look after the plantation while my brother had it out with the Mexicans. If the Randalls are well known, suh, it is not through me. My yearly trip to New Orleans is the extent of my traveling, and my children, suh, have the felicity to regard me as the most guileless creature that the Almighty ever turned out. Bless their innocent hearts! They never suspect what a thoroughbred man of the world I am. Why, suh, the advice they give me when I start out on these trips would cover the late Lord Chesterfield with confusion, suh. They warn me, especially against gambling. My son Tom, yoh know, is just at that age when he thinks his father an amateur in sin, suh, and, according to him, the river is a paradise foh pirates!"

"Well, I don't think he is far wrong," interrupted Moreau, idly shuffling the cards. "Naturally, this is the greatest waterway in the world. Did yoh ever think of the wealth that passes down here from St. Louis to New Orleans, the fortunes that are lost and won?"

"Every one gambles on the Mississippi, suh, foh here the ladies—my compliments to them—must temporarily yield dominion. And of co'se, as a thoroughbred man of the world, suh, and one who has lived on the river foh over fifty years, I recognize that yoh professional gamblers are an institution; but, bless me, I don't take my son Tom's view of them. They gamble foh a living, yes, but I believe they do so honestly, as yoh or I. We are a gambling nation, suh, foh we are young, red blooded and prosperous, but our country is incapable of giving birth to a man who deals of the bottom of the pack, who is afraid to meet fortune eye to eye. Yoh agree with me, suh?"

"As a fellow patriot, yes—as a sane man, no," replied the other, the satiric gleam again smoldering in the dead slag of his eyes. "Yoh have yet to be picked by a brace of these river vultures—they generally travel in pairs—but as a man of the world, of co'se, yoh would instantly recognize them."

"Of co'se, suh," he heartily agreed the other. "Aside from all else, yoh professional gambler may be remarked

foh his lavish display of diamonds."

"Yoh pardon, suh, but not always. I calculate that as a man of the world yoh have heard of Cameo Kirby?"

"Kirby? That's an old and honored name in Plaquemine, suh," replied Mr. Randall, opening his coat and flaunting inflated cheeks with his huge slouch hat. "Kirby was my neighbor, suh, and I knew his folks well. I had the honor to be of some slight assistance when he went under during the panic years. Crops failed, banks went to smash, but yoh remember, I reckon. Well, suh, Mr. Kirby's son, Eugene, came home from school to find his foh father dead and a bankrupt—everything swept away. That was a hard homecoming, suh. Very sad case. I have often wondered what became of the boy, foh he had all his father's pride and refused to let me exert my privilege of an old neighbor and friend. That was twenty years ago, and since then I have heard in a roundabout way that he had become wild, drifted in with bad companions and taken to the river for a livelihood. In fact, become a common gambler. But of co'se I don't believe it, foh no Kirby could ever do that, suh—fall so low. Yet the name is uncommon. Have yoh ever met this gentleman of whom yoh spoke?"

"Not certainly, suh," replied the other dryly. "I calculate he is no relative of the folks yoh mentioned, foh his reputation, suh, is the worst on the river; known from New Orleans to St. Louis and back again. He and his side partner, suh—a dam carpeping Yankee by the name of Bunce—are the most reckless characters on the river. It is scum like them, suh, who give our fair Mississippi her evil name. Yoh speak of no man dealing of the bottom of the pack. Why, suh, I assure yoh on my honor they're so crooked they have to sleep in a roundhouse. I merely mentioned Kirby's name because of the fact that, man of the world as yoh are, suh, yoh would never pick him foh a professional gambler. Never were a diamond in his life. The cameo is his favorite stone, foh they say it once saved his worthless life, and from it he gets his name, suh. But shall we continue the game? I am still five hundred yoh master, and we have foh hours to kill befoh we make yoh landing."

Randall accepted the cards with unsteady hands. "I assure yoh, suh, yoh are betting against a foregone conclusion," he said, "foh there is no stemming the turn in the tide. I'll bet yoh five hundred on this showdown, and then we'll pull stakes, suh, all square. Yoh further play would be sheer robbery. Yoh can't beat the Randall luck when once it has turned."

"I never believed in luck," replied Moreau, "foh life has demonstrated to me that there is no such abstract. Foh instance, if a coin falls head ten times out of ten it is still an even bet foh heads or tails on the next toss. That is the law, suh, and all the superstition in the world cannot revoke or change it."

"My dear suh," replied the planter, waving an impatient hand, "that is all nonsense, foh I hold that our entire existence is greatly controlled by luck being, suh, and I attend church regularly, but I do not believe, suh, that our poh mundane affairs are regulated by a celestial corporation, especially such affairs as card games. Yoh know yohself, colonel, that the best playing in the world can't stand against a run of blind luck, and as a man of the world I've seen mo' fortunes lost on high hands—foh barnyards topped by foh kinds every trip—just because their holders hadn't sense enough to realize that the tide had set in against them. And I give yoh my word, suh, if finished, thumping the table, "that when I fill a foh card inside straight the Randall luck is sitting into the game right with me, and yoh simply can't win. Oh, yoh may get one or two little pots, but yoh'll finish dead broke. Call it what yoh like—luck or the shuffling of the devil."

"Now, suh, yoh're lucking right against my pet hobby," replied Moreau, leaning across the table and growing as earnest as his companion. "Of co'se I accept yoh word foh past experiences, but it is the old case of the coin. Though yoh may have turned heads a hundred times in succession, as I said, the chance of it being tails is still an even bet. Yoh luck may have changed, but I'm willing to lay ten thousand that I hold the best hands in two out of three. There's a sporting offer, suh, that will test yoh theory."

Randall blinked at his glass. Again he was momentarily sobered.

"No, suh," he said decidedly, pinching at his frilled shirt. "Those are high stakes, colonel, for, as wealth goes nowadays, I am not a very rich man, and I cannot afford to jeopardize the welfare of my children for the sake of proving my point. Again, suh, I consider it would be taking an unfair advantage of yoh."

"Come, yoh statements don't agree, Mr. Randall," laughed the other. "What do yoh jeopardize, suh, if yoh consider the advantage entirely with yohself? However," he finished, with some coldness; "this is but a game, suh, and I had no idea that yoh were at all imperiling yoh welfare."

"The Randalls, suh, never incur an obligation which they cannot meet," hotly interrupted the other, the drink showing in his eyes. "Yoh pardon, suh, if I have touched on personal matters. It is not my custom, I assure yoh, to do so with strangers."

"Now, now, Mr. Randall, suh," interrupted the other, patting the planter's arm. "Yoh pardon, suh, if I have offended. I am an old soldier," twirling his mustaches, "and wharps own an exaggerated and touchy sense of honor. When yoh mentioned imperiling yoh welfare it seemed as if we were no longer indulging in a gentleman's game merely foh the sake of passing the time. I have a very delicate sense of honor, suh, and perhaps I am too ready to back my opinions with sums which I consider mere trifles. I hope this difference of opinion will not impair our but newly formed friendship, Mr. Randall."

"I was too hasty, colonel," replied

the other, "foh I reckon my pride is as touchy as yoh own. Come, fill up yoh glass, suh. Yoh're a good fellow, and I'm a good fellow. We're both good fellows, suh. A Randall never yet refused to back his opinion, and ten thousand is as much a picaune affair to me as to yoh. If yoh persist in going broke, I'll take yoh bet, suh. The best two out of three. My cards, I reckon. There's my money, suh." And he thumped a buckskin bag on the table.

"Covered, suh," replied Moreau, carelessly peeling off ten \$1,000 bills.

By now the unconcern which Mr. Randall displayed was entirely authentic, for his incessant attention to his glass had lent him a bibulous courage and defiance of the future, in which lurked no wholesome heaven of caution. Moreover, his pride had been delicately touched to the quick, and rather than appear a "piker" before this magnificent acquaintance he would readily have hazarded his entire estate. Pride of family was his fetish, and a Randall, he considered, was an Admirable Crichton, who could be beaten at nothing. All this was quite aside from his desire to uphold his self bestowed reputation of man of the world and the immutable conviction that his luck had turned. There was no doubt that if he had not sold his sugar crop for such an unexpectedly high figure he would not have embarked on his subsequent gentle carousal, nor, although of a jovial nature, so quickly formed a friendship with the magnificent and highly estimable Colonel Moreau, owner of the very delicate sense of honor. Although in that period, a decade or so before the war which severed the country, but to ultimately knit it the more firmly together, the punch bowl was an institution in every southern household. Mr. Randall was not what is termed a drinking man, and it was



"CAMEO KIRBY—THE WORST ONE ON THE RIVER."

solely on his yearly business trips to the Crescent City that he permitted himself any latitude in that direction. Meanwhile Mr. Randall had shuffled, dealt and lost the first showdown. The next, however, he won, only to lose the third and last.

"I calculate," observed Moreau, carelessly sweeping toward him the buckskin bag, "that I have proved my theory, suh. Yoh tide has not turned, except foh the worse. An even bet that yoh lose the best out of the next six hands. We'll make it that number in order to give yoh Randall luck a chance to come in. foh it really seems as if it was very bashful, suh. Do yoh take me? Of co'se yoh are the doctor, suh, as I am the winner."

The bird being plucked, the venture was no longer scrupulously careful regarding its deportment, and, in fact, if Mr. Randall had been himself he could not but have noted the contempt and derision in the estimable colonel's voice and eyes.

"Yes, I am the doctor, suh," replied the planter thickly, "and a Randall never quits. Never, suh! I take yoh, and I raise yoh bet. Fifty thousand that I beat yoh foh out of six. That's the way I play, suh. Now, do yoh take me, Colonel Moreau?"

A momentary astoundment flickered in the other's eyes, for it seemed as if the bird had not been picked so cleanly as he had supposed. "I reckoned yoh cleaned out, suh," he said cautiously. "If yoh're serious, of co'se I take yoh."

Mr. Randall, awaying unsteadily, promptly slammed a green morocco wallet on the table. "That and a deed to my plantation, colonel, against yoh winnings and fo'hy thousand. I am about to show yoh, suh, how a Randall plays poker. I stake everything I own on the fact that yoh leave this table dead broke, suh. Here's to the Randall luck, and to the devil, suh, with everything else! And, drinking to this admirable sentiment, he raised his glass, drained it at a draft and sent it crashing to the floor.

A lupine twist came to the other's lips as he produced pen, ink and paper. "Yoh just make out that deed now, suh," he said suavely. "My name is Colonel Jacques Gaspard Deschamps Moreau, and very much at yoh service, suh."

He stopped and whirled about, the pen extended in his hand, as the door of the private stateroom opened, giving admittance to a man of perhaps thirty-five, who exuded a certain debonaire and rakish atmosphere. At the neck of this gentleman's elaborately frilled shirt there gleamed a huge cameo, and companion stones fastened the cuffs at his wrists.

"Gentlemen, yoh servant, and my humble apologies," he said, with an elaborate bow. "I trust this is not an untimely intrusion."

CHAPTER II.

"THIS is a private stateroom, suh," interrupted Moreau,



"I TRUST THIS IS NOT AN UNTIMELY INTERUSION."

glaring at the intruder.

"What—Why, as I live, it is Colonel Moreau—by all the saints, yoh admirable self, my dear fellow!" heartily exclaimed the younger man, slapping the other on the back. "These lights are so dished disoblighing I didn't recognize yoh. I have been watching the game for some time through that window," pointing to one on his right, "and yoh must remember that a state-room isn't private so long as the curtains aren't drawn. If I had known yoh were aboard I would have hunted yoh up long ago, for yoh know how I love a game, colonel, and hence this ventured intrusion. Have yoh any objection to making it three corners?" His bow included Mr. Randall, now blinking at the table.

"Sorry, but quite impossible, suh," replied Moreau shortly. "I am already this gentleman's master foh a matter of ten thousand or so—he has been playing in dam poh luck—and our next wager is for fifty thousand. Too high foh yoh, I calculate?"

"Not at all, I assure yoh," lightly replied the intruder, smiling into the other's venomous eyes. "Come! If yoh friend is willing, let me sit in. I really insist upon losing to yoh, colonel. Won't yoh introduce me?"

Moreau hesitated, trying to read the other's eyes. Then, apparently satisfied, he turned to the nodding Mr. Randall, saying: "Have yoh any objection, suh, to making it three? My friend, suh, Mr.—er—Mr. Jackson of New Orleans."

"Honored, suh! Honored!" replied the planter, arising and extending a frank hand. "I warn yoh, suh, that the Randall luck has turned and that yoh will surely lose. Stay out, suh; stay out!" he added impressively, patting the other's shoulder. "I am about to make a killing, and I don't want yoh to be among the dead. The colonel and I are old men of the world, suh, but this is no place foh a young man like yoh. I trust yoh will take my advice in the spirit in which it is offered, foh I am a father, suh, and I like yoh. By Gad, yoh remind me of a dear friend I once had—the Kirbys, suh, of Plaquemine!"

"Come," interrupted Moreau, "let us resume our friendly hostilities. Mr. Randall, foh yoh make yoh landing, suh, in about half an hour."

"I thank yoh for yoh advice, sir," said the intruder, with sudden gravity, while gently and unobtrusively he steered Mr. Randall to his seat. "But I am afraid it has come too late, for card games of all kinds are my weakness. Perhaps if I had received it when I was younger—But I see our good colonel is impatient."

"I am," replied Moreau, shuffling the cards, "foh we have only half an hour, and it is to be the best out of six hands. Come, my money is up, as yoh see, suh, and Mr. Randall draws a deed for his plantation as his stakes, so we await yoh pleasure, Mr.—er—Jackson."

"I understand yoh to say that the stakes were fifty, not twenty thousand?" replied the other, casually glancing at the colonel's roll.

"I calculate my check is good for the balance," replied Moreau, signaling a warning with his eyes—"the National Bank of New Orleans, suh."

"Ah, a very sound institution, for I draw against it myself," observed the younger man. "As, of course, we do not carry such an amount with us," he added, with deference, turning to Mr. Randall, "Colonel Moreau and I must of necessity substitute our checks. We are strangers to yoh, sir, and—"

"Yoh word, suh, is entirely sufficient," interrupted the planter, waving his hand. "This is a question of honor between us, foh I might draw a deed to a plantation I never owned. I am a man of the world, suh, and I reckon we each can recognize a southern gentleman on sight."

"Yes, in the present company that is not a very difficult matter," gravely responded Mr. Jackson. "Shall we cut for the deal? The four best hands take all. Ah, luck is with me. I take the cards, sir."

"One moment," said Moreau, "as no stakes are up I reckon I'll give my check for the full amount should I lose." Pocketing his roll, he glanced satirically at Mr. Jackson.

If for a presumable amateur who occasionally indulged in a gentleman's game merely for the sake of passing the time Colonel Moreau had exhibited a wonderful aptitude at shuffling and dealing his performance was now completely overshadowed by that of the young intruder, whose lightning deftness was almost uncanny. Talking nonchalantly and brilliantly, he stacked the deck with a beautiful precision, fascinating in the extreme, even while the colonel's watchful and suspicious eyes never for a moment relaxed their vigil. Owing entirely to this marvelous and criminal skill Mr. Jackson won on his own deal and, luck following him, was also on that of Mr. Randall. As each and every one of the colonel's undertakings were highly estimable he naturally held the

best hand when, for a moment, the cards were in his power, and it speaks eloquently for Mr. Jackson's large charity of judgment that he refrained from criticism even when acutely aware that the middle aged creole had rather clumsily garnered his third ace from the bottom of the deck. But as youth must be served, especially when possessor of such consummate skill as that owned by Mr. Jackson, the latter handsomely won his fourth showdown with surprising ease, verve and dash.

"Well, that winds her," airily remarked the colonel, arising and stretching his long arms. "One hundred thousand ain't such a bad cleanup, I reckon, and yoh always were lucky, yoh young scamp, and there's no playing against it. Yoh even topped my foh kings. I calculate the Randall luck finished a very poh last. How about yoh theory now, suh?"

The planter did not reply, for it is somewhat difficult for a but newly ruined man to sense the full humor of his condition. In silence he drew toward him the pen and ink, while for a long moment he stared at the white sheet of paper, upon which he was about to give title to all which he owned. He and his children were beggars, total and complete. This was the turning of the tide, his royal homecoming. For a moment he bowed his grizzled head; then, shutting his teeth against all thoughts of the future, seized the quill pen. For a Randall must show the world how it can lose. A Randall must be beaten at nothing—even at playing the fool.

"Yoh name, suh?" he courteously inquired, turning to the young stranger who had proved so fortunate.

"Eugene Kirby, sir."

"What?" exclaimed the planter in a dazed manner. "I thought, suh—"

"Oh, the colonel sometimes calls me Mr. Jackson because he thinks I resemble the general," lightly replied Cameo Kirby as, head between hands, he stared gravely at the table. "Any one will tell yoh my name is Eugene Kirby—even the Texas tender knows it."

"Ah, the General. I have a boy, suh, whom we affectionately call by that name," replied Mr. Randall irrelevantly, staring at the ceiling. "I have three children, suh. There is Tom and Adele and the General. Their mother is dead, suh. And yoh say yoh name is Eugene Kirby. Very strange, suh. I know the Kirbys of Plaquemine, suh. No relation, I suppose. But yoh pardon, suh."

And, with a hand now steady and firm, he wrote and signed the deed to the Randall plantation and, with a bow, handed it to the gambler whose father he had befriended; the gambler whose reputation was said to be the worst on the river; the son of the man who had been his nearest neighbor and closest friend.

This accomplished, Mr. Randall arose unsteadily and walked to the door, where he turned and for a moment surveyed the smoke fouled room with its litter of empty bottles. And if for a moment a fleeting realization of the very thorough manner in which he had been victimized permeated his throbbing brain no hint of it was depicted in face or bearing.

"Good evening, gentlemen," he said gravely, "and thank yoh for the obligation. Good evening." Head erect, he walked out and very softly closed the door.

Kirby resumed his preoccupied attitude at the table, while Moreau, carelessly lighting a cheroot and pouring himself a drink, sprawled elegantly over an adjacent couch.

"Well, I calculate that's the easiest mark that ever came our way," he observed, with a laugh. "Green as the everlasting hills," quietly pocketing Mr. Randall's wallet, a delicate maneuver which Kirby neglected to note. "I calculate this is the first time yoh and I ever played together, eh? Yoh're a deuce of a hand at the cards, my boy—never saw yoh equal befoh. I take it, yoh partner, Mr. Larkin Bunce, is not with yoh this trip or yoh wouldn't have so unceremoniously doubled up with me. Or perhaps yoh two have fallen out, eh? If so, suh, I will be happy to make our impromptu partnership permanent."

Kirby swung slowly around and fixedly regarded his magnificent and amiable companion. "Since when have yoh contemplated such an admirable partnership?" he blandly inquired.

"Ever since I first saw yoh play, Kirby. Come, yoh partner, Bunce, is crude—a blubber faced Yankee, with no manners whatever, suh. But yoh and I are gentlemen and would make the best team on the river. I consider our play tonight the highest haul in a decade, and I promise yoh mo' like it, foh I never go in foh picaune affairs. My fingers are growing a little too stiff foh skillful manipulation, and I frankly own I haven't yoh delicate and admirable finesse. But I have the manner, Kirby, and can rope the cattle for yoh to brand, suh. I'll guarantee yoh the biggest game on the river."

"Yoh will oblige me, sir," replied the other, carefully lighting a cheroot, "by employing the prefix to my name—if ever in the future I am unfortunate enough to have yoh address me. Permit me to inform yoh that yoh are a blank scoundrel, sir! I cannot be too emphatic concerning that statement. Whenever I form a partnership with yoh I will be more qualified for a front seat in hades than I am at the present moment. Why, yoh low, thieving swamp cat," he cried, losing all self control, "how dare yoh think I gamble like yoh—by getting unsuspecting victims drunk and then robbing them? I watched yoh outrageously cheat Mr. Randall and ply him with liquor in order to cover yoh characteristically clumsy manipulation of the cards, and if I stepped in tonight and stooped to emulate the type of game which yoh solely play to complete and save yoh victim from complete and total ruin. It is unnecessary to say that when Mr. Randall is capable of estimating what has occurred and is once more himself this deed will be returned to him."

"Now, Kirby, yoh can't play that game on me," cried Moreau, jumping to his feet. "Yoh come in on my kill

and then try to do me out of the spoils. That don't go, Kirby. I'm too old a hand. Keep that line of talk for sapheads. The Randall plantation is sold under the hammer, and I get two-thirds or—"

"Or what?" coldly demanded Kirby, carefully pocketing the deed. "Yoh know me, Mr. Moreau, so don't try to pull a derring. It's considerably safer to wait until my back is turned. I say Mr. Randall himself will destroy this deed and that his plantation will not be sold, and yoh may believe it or not, just as yoh like. That ten thousand yoh virtually stole I cannot, unfortunately, refund; but, believe me, that is the entire extent of yoh stealings. For once in yoh life yoh are going to release a victim before he has been completely sucked dry; for once in yoh life yoh are going to be half-way decent!"

"Decent?" belittled the other. "That's a compliment from one of yoh standing!"

"Like yourself, I game for a living, Mr. Moreau," coldly interrupted Kirby; "but, unlike yourself, I endeavor to do so honestly, and I have never yet stooped to the methods which yoh exclusively employ. Although yoh are



MOREAU, CAREFULLY WIPING THE SMOKEING PISTOL, RETURNED IT TO HIS POCKET.

seemingly not aware of the fact, there is a distinct difference between a gambler and a thief. Once I had the privilege of meriting the friendship and esteem of gentlemen like Mr. Randall, and I now warn yoh to keep yoh claws off him. If ever in the future I catch yoh bleeding him as yoh did this evening yoh and I will have a different sort of discussion. For yoh own sake I beg yoh to remember this."

Before Moreau could reply the sound of a single shot rang out from one of the staterooms and echoed itself over the river. Impulsively Kirby turned to the door, and as he did so Moreau quickly withdrew his hand from the breast of his long frock coat. A tongue of flame leaping from his Derringer shattered the stagnant tobacco fumes, and with the acrid bite of powder in

his nostrils and a bullet through the lungs the younger man, fighting hard against his fall, slowly eased himself to the floor.

"For yoh, suh," courteously sneered Moreau, carefully wiping the smoking pistol and returning it to his breast pocket, while he coolly watched the writhing figure cough out its life. "I calculate, suh, yoh are now booked foh that front seat in hades which yoh declined. I'll teach yoh to play a low down game on a gentleman, suh."

As he turned to refill his glass the door was violently torn open and a large, florid faced man entered. Moreau turned, his hand slipping into his breast pocket. For a long moment the two confronted each other in silence.

"Mr. Randall has just blown out his brains," said the intruder slowly at length. "I guess that's yoh work, yoh fine old bucko. But I heard another shot. Where's my pal, Gene Kirby?"

His eyes, restlessly searching the darkened corners, at length happened on the huddled thing, now lying very still. "Gene," he cried, stooping and raising the other's head to his knee. "Speak to me, boy. It's yoh old pal, Bunce."

"I calculate yoh friend is past speaking, suh," observed Moreau, backing toward the door and keeping a wary eye on the florid faced Yankee. "Mr. Kirby insulted me, suh, and has paid foh it with his life. I shot him in fair and honorable combat."

"Fair and honorable hades!" snarled Bunce, leaping to his feet. "Shot him in the back, yoh skunk—yoh usual fair and honorable manner! Yoh haven't the nerve to stand up and face a crippled hen!"

"Stand back, suh!" warned the other, drawing his Derringer. "Yoh are naturally excited, and so I choose to overlook yoh words, which I will not do in the future. But don't push me too far, suh—don't push me too far, foh even a gentleman has his limits."

"No man ever double banked Gene Kirby twice," said Larkin Bunce ironically, "and it'll be a good thing for yoh, Moreau, if he is past speaking, which, I guess, looks the case. If he happens to pull through yoh can gamble he'll fix yoh case himself, but if he doesn't, my fine old bucko, I'll settle yoh honorable hash. Yoh've stunk up this river just about along enough."

"It will afford me considerable pleasure, suh," replied the pseudo colonel in his best manner, "to place yoh in the same position which yoh friend Mr. Kirby will shortly occupy. I refer, suh, to a front seat in the grill room of his most Satanic majesty, Yoh servant, suh, and a very good evening." Bowing, the flower of southern chivalry backed limply through the door and disappeared.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

Lunatic Slays His Father.
Bud Plunet, who escaped from the state asylum for the insane at Parsons, Kan., returned to his home and killed his father as he lay asleep. He first struck him with a club and then cut his throat. Ten years ago he killed his brother and was adjudged insane.

Fell Dead on His Plow.
While plowing on his farm, near Durham, N. C., former Congressman John M. Atwater dropped over dead. He was seventy years old.